

Message Text

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47

ACTION SCI-06

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P 141830Z DEC 73

FM AMEMBASSY LONDON

TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 6496

USAEC WASHDC PRIORITY

UNCLAS LONDON 14797

AEC FOR COMMISSIONER DOUB

E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: ENRG, UK

SUBJECT: STATE OF PLAY ON PENDING HMG NUCLEAR REACTOR
DECISION

REF: (A) STATE 243146; (B) LONDON 14147; (C) 14634

1. SUMMARY: FOLLOWING SUPPLEMENT TO REFTEL WAS BASED ON PRESS ACCOUNTS. IT MAY BE OF USE TO AEC COMMISSIONER DOUB IN PREPARING FOR VISIT TO LONDON DECEMBER 18-22. SIR ARNOLD WEINSTOCK, GEC, TESTIFYING BEFORE THE HOUSE OF COMMONS SELECT COMMITTEE, HAS STRONGLY SUPPORTED USE OF U.S.-DESIGN LWR'S, SUGGESTING A LONG-RANGE ROLE FOR BRITISH TECHNOLOGY IN HTR AND FAST BREEDER FIELDS. U.S. GENERAL ELECTRIC COMPANY REPORTEDLY IS PREPARED TO OFFER A SPECIFIC PROPOSAL ON ESSENTIALLY OFF-THE-SHELF BWR. SAFETY OF U.S. DESIGNS EVIDENTLY IS STILL AT QUESTION, HOWEVER. END SUMMARY.

2. HOUSE OF COMMONS SELECT COMMITTEE ON SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY ON DECEMBER 11 BEGAN A NEW ROUND OF HEARINGS ON NUCLEAR REACTOR DECISION FACING HMG. FIRST WITNESS
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WAS SIR ARNOLD WEINSTOCK, HEAD OF THE GENERAL ELECTRIC

COMPANY. OTHER SCHEDULED WITNESSES ARE ARTHUR HAWKINS, CHAIRMAN OF THE CENTRAL ELECTRIC GENERATING BOARD; FRANK TOMBS, CHAIRMAN-DESIGNATE OF THE SOUTH SCOTLAND ELECTRICITY BOARD; AND LORD ALDINGTON, CHAIRMAN OF THE NATIONAL NUCLEAR CORPORATION.

3. AS REPORTED IN THE LONDON PRESS, WEINSTOCK IN TESTIMONY BEFORE COMMITTEE CAME DOWN FLATLY IN FAVOR OF PROVEN LIGHT WATER REACTORS OF U.S. DESIGN AS THE ONLY FEASIBLE CHOICE TO MEET ELECTRIC GENERATING NEEDS OVER SHORT TERM. HE DENIED THAT A DECISION TO ORDER A U.S. REACTOR DESIGN WOULD BE A "BODY BLOW" TO BRITISH PRESTIGE AND TECHNOLOGY, NOTING THAT BRITISH TECHNOLOGICAL CAPABILITIES SHOULD BE DEVOTED TO LONGER TERM THROUGH CONSTRUCTION OF PROTOTYPE HIGH-TEMPERATURE GAS-COOLED REACTOR AND WITH CONTINUING DEVELOPMENT OF FAST BREEDER REACTORS. WEINSTOCK STRESSED TO THE COMMITTEE THAT, WHILE HE HAD LATTERLY COME TO THESE CONCLUSIONS ON THE NECESSITY OF UTILIZING U.S. DESIGN REACTORS, FINAL DECISION ON ORDERING WILL BE MADE BY SECRETARY OF STATE FOR TRADE AND INDUSTRY PETER WALKER, ACTUAL U.K. CUSTOMER FOR REACTORS WILL BE CEGB, AND SAFETY CONSIDERATIONS WILL BE ASSESSED BY HMG'S NUCLEAR INSTALLATIONS INSPECTORATE.

4. IN RELATED DEVELOPMENTS, A U.S. GENERAL ELECTRIC TEAM HAS BEEN IN AND OUT OF LONDON IN RECENT DAYS AND REPORTEDLY IS PREPARED TO MAKE A SPECIFIC PROPOSAL TO HMG ON ITS BOILING WATER REACTOR, PROVIDED A DECISION IS MADE IN FAVOR OF IMPORTING A U.S. DESIGN. UNDER-CURRENT OF OPPOSITION TO U.S. DESIGN REACTORS ON GROUNDS OF SAFETY CONTINUES MEANWHILE AT LEAST IN THE PRESS; PROMINENT NEWSPAPER COVERAGE WAS GIVEN EARLY IN DECEMBER TO REPORTS OF THE SHUTDOWN OF THE SAN ONOFRE NUCLEAR PLANT IN CALIFORNIA WITH POINTED COMMENT ON THE "HAZARDS" INVOLVED.
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